DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 029 JC 970 135

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TITLE Human Development or Developmental Psychology: That Is the Question, or What's in a Name?
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 6p.; In: Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology (10th, Ellenville, NY, March 20-22, 1996); see JC 970 128.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Instruction; Comparative Analysis; Course Content; *Course Organization; *Developmental Psychology; *Educational Practices; Higher Education; *Professional Education; Teaching Methods; *Theory Practice Relationship; *Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

A project was undertaken to examine sources of variety in developmental survey courses found under the headings of developmental psychology and human development. Specifically, the project sought to determine how development-related content and pedagogy were customized to adapt to such academic contexts as psychology major courses and service for professional programs in education, nursing, and therapy and to identify problems associated with adapting content. Tensions were identified in all courses with respect to achieving depth versus breadth, emphasizing theory versus practical application, and stressing research findings versus personal experiences as a knowledge base. Twenty catalog descriptions and course syllabi were examined for similarities and differences in content and delivery, finding no consensus regarding minimal requirements for content and large discrepancies in the age ranges covered and topical versus chronological organization. Moreover, the varied emphases in subject matter found among colleges and between departments within colleges made it difficult for transfer students to earn equivalent course credit. One solution for overcoming the differences is to emphasize teaching methods that foster "liberal skills," assigning case study analyses, behavior observations, or field interviews to help develop research, writing, problem-solving, observation, interviewing, interpersonal, and thinking skills. (TGI)

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ED 405 029

Human Development or Developmental Psychology; That is the Question

or

What's In A Name?

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Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology (10th, Ellenville, NY, March 20-22, 1996)

JC 970 135

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In developmental psychology, course content may vary with the context in which a particular course is taught. This is a particular example of a broader issue of the content of undergraduate psychology. The roundtable examines sources of the variety of developmental survey courses found under the headings of developmental psychology and human development.

I. Introduction to the problem and to the contexts under discussion.
Each of us has struggled with the content and method of delivery of human development in different academic contexts. These contexts included providing a foundation for the psychology major and service for professional programs in an undergraduate liberal arts setting. The professional programs included education, nursing, occupational and physical therapy. We asked:

- how do we customize content and pedagogy central to the study of development in these different contexts?
- What are the tensions that we experience around our attempts to adapt?

Identification of these tensions was a first step toward achieving a balance. Three tensions persisted across these contexts:

- Depth versus breadth
- Theory versus practical application
- Research findings versus personal experience as knowledge base.

II. Examination of the data: There is no consensus as to the minimal requirements necessary for content for human development. We examined a convenience sample of approximately 20 catalog descriptions and course syllabi looking for similarities and differences in content and delivery. The data represented a variety of institutions, both large and small, public and private. Surprisingly, large discrepancies were found in course content: age ranges included, topical vs. chronological coverage, and varied emphases from college to college and even between departments within colleges. (A poll of the roundtable audience echoed these findings.)

III. Pragmatic concerns are generated by these discrepancies for students transferring from one institution to another and/or seeking credit through examination--a registrar's nightmare. For example, different titles, whether for course or exam, may reflect identical content resulting in double counting.

Additionally, at our own institution, we disallow students taking both child psychology and human development for credit due to significant content overlap. However, students taking an applied human development course from a professional department are allowed to take the human development course offered by psychology because of the lack of developmental psychology content in the applied course.

IV. The discrepancies found within and across settings are generated by different interests, different expected outcomes, and different interpretations of essential contents. The following student comments are illustrative of these tensions:

A psychology major asserted that "You study theory in child psychology, not in human development."

A professic esting the discussion of theory in the course asserted, "PTs don't need depth."

Another student commented "This is interesting, but what do we need to know for the test?"

At the level of cross-department interactions, one developmental psychology professor was chastised for including chimp communication in her presentation of language acquisition to occupational therapy students: "Remember, this is a human development class, not a course on animals."

V. Balancing breadth and depth, theoretical and applied content, and research findings with personal experience seems to be a continuing struggle across teaching contexts. Does the perennial question "What do we need to know for the test" have different meanings in professional and liberal arts programs? Accountability has a different scope in professional training than in liberal arts education. Professionals need to know "the truth" because they are accountable for selecting appropriate treatment and intervention. When a professor says there is no "right" answer or points to the multitude of variables that may influence an effect, professional students can become both frustrated and angry and question the credibility of the professor. Both positions are understandable, but it is difficult to communicate across the boundaries. This heightens the contrast between "human growth and development" courses and the "research orientation" of developmental psychology courses.

While respecting these applied concerns, we have relied on a variety of teaching methods that foster the "liberal skills" (Hogan, 1991). These project

assignments teach "liberal skills" and address the research vs. experience question.

Assignment	Liberal skills
Graduated approach to case study	Research, writing, and problem solving skills
Written reports of observation of behavior	Observation, writing, assessment skills
Interview adults about social roles; compare results to research literature	Interview/interpersonal skills, observation, thinking and writing
Clinical interview of children during field work.	Interview/interpersonal skills, thinking, writing.

VI. There is no consensus on the basic content of the developmental course. Because developmental study is an approach, contents can and do vary widely within and between colleges. A developmental framework which is the *sine qua non* may be useful in making determinations about whether a course is properly called developmental psychology, human development, or has some other label. We seem to be searching for a "core" of development that is present in the courses we teach within the psychology curriculum and that we export out when we teach "developmental psychology" in other programs. Teaching development outside a psychology program can offer new perspectives on the ways we teach development within psychology. Thus these tensions can be productive. Our experiences here suggested ways in which we can make our liberal arts psychology courses more accessible and more meaningful to students. This exploration has exposed our own egocentrism ("psycho-centrism?") and made us realize that when we speak of human development as psychologists, we do not all mean the same thing. This has led us to understand more acutely the need for a developmental framework.

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